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## UN officials call for more action to ‘stem the tide’ of racism and intolerance



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Ten years after a global conference in Durban, South Africa, sought to uproot all forms of racism, much progress has been made, yet intolerance has actually increased in many parts of the world, top United Nations officials warned today.

“The resurgence and persistence of such inhumane attitudes and detrimental practices indicate that we have not done enough to stem the tide,” [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) [told](#) a high-level General Assembly meeting held to mark the 10th anniversary of the adoption of the so-called Durban Declaration, the outcome document of the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

In a political [declaration](#) adopted by consensus, participants reaffirmed their commitment to fighting racism in all its forms, acknowledged that countless human beings continue to be victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, and called on the UN system, international and regional organizations and all stakeholders, including parliaments, civil society and the private sector to intensify their efforts to eliminate the scourge.

“Let us do more to embrace diversity and safeguard these groups’ dignity.” Mr. Ban said, noting calls at Durban to combat discrimination against Africans and persons of African descent, Asians and persons of Asian descent, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, minorities and Roma.

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“Neither race, colour or language; not political or other opinion; not property, birth or other status - none of these should be a barrier to the enjoyment of rights and freedoms. Let us also stay in the vanguard against bigotry, and commit to fighting discrimination based on gender and sexual orientation.”

Among advances made since 2001 Mr. Ban cited new laws and institutions seeking justice, new initiatives promoting dialogue, new mindsets taking hold and better measures to prosecute and protect against grave crimes such as genocide, apartheid, ethnic cleansing and contemporary forms of slavery.

He warned that ignorance and intolerance are among the root causes of conflicts, with racism and discrimination posing major obstacles to development. Hard economic times only exacerbate the vicious cycle, in which discrimination leads to deprivation, and poverty deepens discrimination, he said, noting that competition for jobs and other difficulties often trigger hostility towards migrants and minorities.

“We must resist polarizing politicians who play on people’s fears and use stereotypes to gain electoral advantage,” he added.

Mr. Ban said everyone was aware of the controversy emerging from both the 2001 Durban conference and a follow-up meeting in Geneva in 2009, with discussions relating to the Middle East and the legacy of the past raising objections from some delegations.

“On this anniversary, let us re-state some basic principles,” he stressed. “This process is meant to further the world’s essential fight against racism. We should condemn anyone who uses this platform to subvert that effort with inflammatory rhetoric, baseless assertions and hateful speech.”

General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser also noted that much more remains to be done in the fight against racism. “Unfortunately, despite progress made since the DDPA [Durban Declaration and Programme of Action], instances of xenophobia, racism and intolerance have increased in severity and frequency...

“It is the responsibility of States to take the necessary legislative measures to prevent the occurrence of discriminatory practices and to grant justice to the victims.”

High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay added her voice to the call for intensified efforts. “We must confront the regrettable gap between the commitments made at that time [2001] and the concrete and effective action actually undertaken,” she said.

“Let us pledge here and now to revitalize our efforts nationally, regionally and globally to combat the scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.”

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